

Capitol Hill is a tumultuous place. Beyond the hustle and bustle of hearings, votes, speeches, interviews, and meetings that make up an ordinary day, lawmakers must maintain focus on any number of pressing national and international matters. Currently, a \$14 trillion national debt and the critical need for responsible budgeting, a new military conflict in Libya, and the cautious evaluation of the nuclear situation in Japan command our attention.

Returning home to the people and places of the First District is, literally and figuratively, a breath of fresh air from the crowded and frenzied world of Washington. We call it the "good life" in Nebraska – a Heartland culture of hard work, personal responsibility, and neighbor helping neighbor that has helped Nebraska remain stable, peaceful and secure in the midst of a very difficult period for our nation.

While home for a period of district work recently, I was fortunate to review firsthand two excellent examples of entrepreneurial success in Nebraska. One business, a Lincoln manufacturer, transforms Norfolk steel into a wide variety of metal products for numerous customers in the region. Making everything from gas meters to piping and wrought iron fence, it uses the most advanced automated technology to meet market demands while providing good jobs for more than 150 Nebraskans. It serves as an excellent example of how specialized manufacturing in the Heartland – along with agriculture and clean energy generation - can help lead America's economic recovery.

I also reviewed the operations of an innovative manufacturer in the specialty pet foods market. It is a homegrown company that now employs more than 100 people in Fremont. Its products continually evolve to serve its customers, and its employees are committed to producing a unique and high quality product for animal lovers nationwide and internationally.

It is no coincidence that as a state, Nebraska today has the second lowest unemployment rate in the nation and consistently ranks at or near the top of national surveys evaluating economic strength and opportunity. We were recently named the "happiest" state in the nation in one survey and Lincoln the second-happiest city in the U.S. in another.

Nebraskans' hard work and fiscal pragmatism has positioned us to lead America's economic recovery. What works in Nebraska could work for America: a focus first on the values that give rise to sound thinking, good governance, and economic diversity. This, matched with a resolve

to do good work and preserve opportunities for the next generation, is a "Nebraska model" that would serve Washington well.